

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 STATE 020913
ORIGIN NODS-00

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T STATE 020913

NODIS

FOLLOWING REPEAT BEIRUT 369 ACTION SECSTATE INFO DAMASCUS
TEL AVIV 28 JAN QUOTE

S E C R E T BEIRUT 0369

NODIS

FOR THE SECRETARY FROM CHARGE

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SY, IS, LE, US

SUBJECT: ASF DEPLOYMENT IN SOUTHERN LEBANON

REF: STATE 019280

1. I CALLED ON PRESIDENT SARKIS AT 1700 JAN 28 AND
CAREFULLY WENT OVER ORAL TALKING POINTS PARA ONE REFTEL.
PRESIDENT SARKIS' IMMEDIATE RESPONSE WAS THAT DEPLOYMENT
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OF ASF SOUTH FROM JAZZIN WAS NOT JUST A QUESTION OF
COLLECTION OF HEAVY ARMS BUT OF PROTECTING THE CHRISTIAN
VILLAGES. PEOPLE LIVING THERE HAD BEEN AFRAID TO LEAVE
THEIR HOMES AND REFUGEES AFRAID TO RETURN. HE HAD BEEN
UNDER EXTREMELY HEAVY PRESSURE FROM THE MARONITE PATRIARCH
AND OTHER CHRISTIAN LEADERS TO PUT A STOP TO THE
DEPREDACTIONS OF THE PALESTINIANS IN THIS AREA. IT WAS

"UNTHINKABLE" AND UNBELIEVABLE" THAT THE ISRAELIS SHOULD REACT SO VIOLENTLY TO THIS LIMITED DEPLOYMENT OF THE ASF. HE REPEATED THAT LESS THAN ONE BATTALION WAS SPREAD ALONG THE ROAD FROM JAZZIN TO NABATIYAH, ONLY A "HANDFUL" OF ASF TROOPS WERE IN NABATIYAH ITSELF, AND NABATIYAH WAS AT LEAST 14 KILOMETERS AS THE CROW FLIES FROM THE ISRAELI BORDER. IT HAD NEVER OCCURRED TO HIM THAT THE ISRAELIS WOULD REACT SO STRONGLY. HIS INTENTION HAD BEEN SIMPLY TO PROVIDE SOME SECURITY FOR THE INHABITANTS OF THIS REGION.

2. I REPLIED THAT IT WAS APPARENT FROM NEWSPAPER AND RADIO REPORTS THAT NABATIYAH HAD A SPECIAL SYMBOLIC IMPORTANCE AS FAR AS THE ISRAELIS WERE CONCERNED. I THEN REFERRED TO THE ISRAELI CABINET MEETING ON SUNDAY AND ASKED HOW SOON I MIGHT HAVE HIS RESPONSE TO THE ISRAELI REQUEST FOR A DATE AND TIME-TABLE BY WHICH THE ASF UNITS WILL BE WITHDRAWN. SARKIS REPLIED THAT HE WOULD HAVE TO DISCUSS THIS QUESTION WITH HIS COUNCIL OF MINISTERS WHICH MEETS ON MONDAY AND SAID HE COULD NOT GIVE ME AN ANSWER BEFORE MONDAY AFTERNOON LOCAL TIME.

3. IN THE ABSENCE OF COL. AL-HAJJ, WHO HAS BEEN PRESENT MOST OF MY PREVIOUS MEETINGS WITH SARKIS, THE PRESIDENT WAS NOT ABLE TO GIVE ME ANY INFORMATION ON THE ALLEGED MOVEMENT SINCE TUESDAY OF SOME ASF PERSONNEL SOUTHEAST OF NABATIYAH. (COMMENT: IF THIS IS A REFERENCE TO THE PRESENCE OF ASF FORCES AT KAFR TIBNIT, COL. AL-HAJJ TOLD ME PREVIOUSLY THAT THIS
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VILLAGE WAS ENTERED AS PART OF THE INITIAL MOVEMENT OF THE ASF FORCES SOUTH FROM JAZZIN, IN ORDER TO CUT THE ROAD FROM NABATIYAH TO MARJAYUN, AND WAS COMPLETED BY TUESDAY, JAN 25. END COMMENT.)

4. I ALSO REPEATED THE USG DESIRE TO BE HELPFUL IN PREVENTING ANY DESTABILIZING DEVELOPMENTS IN THE REGION AND SAID THAT IN THE PRESENT ATMOSPHERE, EVEN THE SMALLEST MOVEMENT OF ASF TROOPS FURTHER SOUTH COULD CAUSE MISUNDERSTANDINGS AND CREATE TENSIONS. SARKIS NODDED HIS UNDERSTANDING AND AGAIN ASSURED ME THAT NO SUCH MOVEMENTS WOULD BE MADE WITHOUT PRIOR CONSULTATION WITH US.

5. COMMENT: SARKIS CERTAINLY GIVES THE IMPRESSION OF BEING COMPLETELY SINCERE IN HIS PROTESTATIONS THAT HE HAD NO INTENTION OF SPRINGING A "SURPRISE" ON EITHER US OR THE ISRAELIS BY ORDERING THE ASF SOUTH FROM JAZZIN. HE REPEATED HIS ASSERTION THAT HE UNDERSTOOD THE ISRAELIS

WERE SENSITIVE ONLY ABOUT AN ASF MOVE TO TYRE, OR
THROUGH MARJAYUN. IN LIGHT OF THE EVENTS OF THE PAST
WEEK, HOWEVER, SARKIS CAN NOW HAVE NO DOUBT ABOUT
ISRAELI SENSITIVITY TO EVEN THE SLIGHTEST SOUTHWARD
MOVEMENT OF THE ASF. LANE
UNQTE. VANCE

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Message Attributes

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